

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Testimony of Sheilah D. Larnhart In Re: Proposed Michigan Stolen Valor Law

Good afternoon. My name is Sheilah Diane Larnhart and I am a Gulf War veteran; Desert Shield/Desert Storm. I am also the Commander (elect) for Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3943 in Newport, Michigan.

I personally come before you today to request your support of the Michigan Stolen Valor Law as proposed by Senator Moolenaar; and, originally introduced by Senator Randy Richardville's office in November 2009.

Before doing so, I would like to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to Senators Richardville and Moolenaar for their support of my request for this very important legislation in honor of Michigan's veterans and to thank the committee for their time and attention to this matter.

I request your support of this law to protect and preserve the integrity of military service and for Michigan's brave men and women who now honorably serve, or have served, our great nation.

An act of stolen valor is committed every time an individual embellishes or fabricates a military service record for personal gain or wears an unauthorized military service medal. Every time someone tells these lies, it dishonors our veterans; those who have committed the real acts of valor and who have earned the right to wear military service medals.

Only 10% of Americans bear the cost for the freedoms that the rest of us enjoy. These men and women have given time, life or limb in military service to protect the very freedoms that we hold dear. Currently, as we support overseas contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are reminded daily that freedom isn't free.

An individual commits an act of stolen valor for many reasons: to be admired or to impress others; sometimes it is bar room talk. For others, it is a need to feel important; they tell their false stories so many times that even they begin to believe them.

Most importantly, individuals willingly and knowingly commit an act of stolen valor for fraudulent purposes: money, an advantage over others in employment actions, an advantage when seeking public office, unearned VA medical benefits, for gifts or tickets to community and sporting events. (Note: I have attached a number of recent articles on these imposters who have been caught committing acts of stolen valor).

A Michigan Stolen Valor Law is needed because there is no national database or centralized repository where all military personnel records are stored to access and verify military service, decorations or awards. We need laws at the federal and state levels to protect the honor, valor and service of our military veterans.

In requesting a Michigan law, I acknowledge the Federal Stolen Valor of Act of 2005, as amended in 2006, by former President George W. Bush. Further, while I also acknowledge that federal law "trumps" state law with regards to jurisdiction, I acknowledge that a Michigan Stolen Valor Law is needed for:

**Messaging.** We need to send a strong message to those who may contemplate committing an act of stolen valor that they will be held accountable. People need to know that there will be consequences for anyone who embellishes or fabricates a military service record for personal gain or who wears an unauthorized military service medal.

**Prosecution.** At both the federal and state levels, we are now being tasked to do more with less. The federal government simply doesn't have the necessary resources to prosecute every person who commits an act of stolen valor. If a Michigan Stolen Valor Law is enacted, it will provide a strong avenue for recourse as we could then prosecute and hold accountable those who these commit acts when federal resources are not available.

**Gratitude.** Our veterans must know that we, the people of the State of Michigan, honor veterans; in gratitude for their military service, Michigan will shut down acts of stolen valor.

We must let our military veterans know that we will hold accountable/punish those who

falsely claim military acts of valor as their own.

Additionally, as phony veterans are exposed, real veterans are looked upon in a different light. People start to question the service of anyone who states that he or she is a veteran. Personally, after having read numerous stories of phony veterans and their crimes, I now question folks a little more closely when they state they are a veteran.

In the past, only a small number of people would disrespect military service by using it for their dishonorable actions. Unfortunately, that is not the case anymore. Our veterans do not deserve to have the honor and integrity of military service comprised in this way.

As I complete my testimony here before you, I leave you with the words of George Washington, General-Revolutionary War and 1st President of the United States of America. General Washington, in his General Orders, established the Badge of Military Merit (the precursor for the Purple Heart) and he said:

"Before this favor can be conferred on any man...the name and regiment of the person with the action so certified are to be entered in the Book of Merit; ... and, should any who are not entitled to these honors have the insolence to assume the badges of them, they shall be severely punished."

Historically, and continuing to this present day, there is precedent for shutting down stolen valor. We have the General Orders of General George Washington, the Federal Stolen Valor Act; and other states have enacted Stolen Valor legislation including the state of Kentucky.

From the beginning, we, the people, have spoken and we have said, "stolen valor is wrong and those who commit it shall be punished." A Michigan Stolen Valor Law must be enacted in gratitude and to honor those who have honorably served our great nation...it is the right thing to do.

## Military.com TODAY IN THE MILITARY

### Man Posing as Soldier Sentenced to Prison



May 24, 2011  
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. - After the Army discharged him 17 years ago for a heart condition, Anthony Todd Saxon so desperately wanted to keep serving that he bought a combat uniform and fooled troops at Fort Gordon and his family into believing he remained in the ranks.

Saxon, 36, insisted Monday he meant no harm when he went to the base last year and posed as a master sergeant, saying he was driven by a lifelong desire to serve his country that got cut short after just three years when the Florida National Guard dismissed him in 1994.

"I want to apologize for dishonoring the U.S. Army by impersonating a soldier," Saxon said at his sentencing hearing in U.S. District Court in Augusta. "It's a very big issue to me. It was very hard for me to let go."

Despite delivering a lengthy apology, Saxon was sentenced to four years and nine months in federal prison.

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Judge Dudley Bowen said his chief concern was the assault rifle and several other guns, plus military training grenades, found at Saxon's home in

nearby Keysville. Saxon had a 1996 felony conviction for grand theft in Florida, and prosecutors said authorities had warned him in 2005 that he couldn't legally own weapons because of his record.

Saxon was arrested in June and pleaded guilty in January to impersonating a Soldier, possession of firearms by a convicted felon and possession of a silencer stolen from a local gun shop.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Inman said interviews with Saxon and psychological tests ruled out initial fears that he planned a "Fort Hood scenario" to harm Soldiers at Fort Gordon or that he was "just a crazy individual." Inman told the judge he suspects Saxon was posing as a Soldier to steal military hardware and sell it.

"I don't believe misguided patriotism was the source of his criminal actions in this case," Inman said. "I think the source was a profit motive. He loved this country and loved the Army so much that he decided to lie and steal from the Army."

Saxon wore an Army combat uniform with the rank and insignia of a master sergeant at least 10 times last year to Fort Gordon, home of the Army Signal Corps and one of largest military hospitals in the Southeast. During one visit, according to court records, he convinced a Soldier to give him a laser-targeting sight for a rifle.

The FBI determined Saxon was never employed at Fort Gordon, either as a Soldier or a civilian.

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Inman noted authorities suspect Saxon may have had a live anti-personnel mine at the time of his arrest, though a bomb squad blew it up before investigators could get a close look. Explosives charges were dropped as part of his plea deal, along with counts of theft of government property, theft of a firearm, illegal possession of a rifle with a shortened barrel.



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The sentence Saxon received is far less than the maximum 23 years in prison allowed for the charges he pleaded guilty to.

Time he's already served in prison since his arrest, nearly a year, will count toward his sentence.

Saxon's family pleaded for mercy. His father told the judge that Saxon had known almost since he was born that he wanted to be a Soldier.

Saxon's wife, Rhonda Saxon, said she had forgiven her husband. When Saxon was arrested, prosecutors said, she and other family members believed Saxon was about to deploy overseas to Afghanistan.

"He's a good person," she told the judge. "His love for the military is absolutely crazy. That's all he dreams about and thinks about every day."

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lshaft

May 24, 2011 1:09:16 PM

The jail sentence was for the weapons, not imposing a soldier.

Some of these folks are just brain dead!!!

rkgtactical

May 24, 2011 1:24:06 PM

lShaft, regardless of why he was sentenced, to receive only 4.9 yrs. is a travesty of justice. He's a criminal and should have been sentenced to the whole 23 yrs. I wonder how he was going to explain not being deployed to his family and friends or was he just going to take an extended vacation somewhere? Well he's got his deployment now. LOL

lshaft

May 24, 2011 1:41:33 PM

rkgtactical: Tact - I concur. You and I both know that it appears lenient sentences are now the norm. I was reading a piece the other day where politicians from various states are trying to reduce the inmate population due to the high cost of incarceration.

Hell, it appears this guy was luck to receive the sentence he did - I thought they probably put him on community service washing police cars on the base!!!